

# American Enchantment

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICH HIGGINS

Wandering beneath the flowering ivy and peeking through the front door of Firefly is like being at the gate to the Secret Garden. With a metal firefly sculpture whimsically blinking above me and the day's menu adorned with clever script in a case beside the door, I felt as though I were heading to Beatrix Potter's house for dinner. Upon entering, I found myself in a wonderland of enticing smells, warmth and satisfaction. Inside is a restaurant that perfectly blends professionalism and conviviality.


Chef and owner Brad Levy describes Firefly's cooking as honest and unpretentious, and it has helped American cuisine come of age, respecting its melting-pot provenance of influences and ingredients. Levy and chef de cuisine Lucian Prellwitz source fantastic, mostly local, sustainable ingredients, honoring everything from blueberries to black cod by drawing on simplicity to elevate a dish. Levy and Prellwitz's menu changes weekly, honoring seasonal bounty and drawing inspiration from global cuisine to cook decidedly American dishes. In General Manager Karen Lo's words, it's "home cooking with no ethnic boundaries," inspiring a broad range of flavors to bloom from a relatively small menu. The seven starters and salads and seven mains always offered include many vegetarian and vegan options, each with its own flavors and sense of purpose. Lo mentions that many chefs trained in cooking meat find vegetarian cooking to be a challenge, but Levy and Prellwitz embrace vegetarian cuisine and make Firefly inclusive. They also feature classic Jewish fare — with a few modern twists — during Jewish holidays.

On my visit, my guest and I started the night with a salad of baby lettuces, pickled onions

and thinly sliced peaches with vinaigrette (\$9). It was a simple, perfect way to start a meal: a bright burst of sweet, salty and pickled flavors, with the peaches' golden flesh and ruby-hued skin adding beautiful color. We moved on to fried green tomatoes with wild Gulf shrimp remoulade (\$10.50), sinking our teeth into the thick tomato steaks layered in crispy batter. In other cuisines, tomatoes are often accompanied by salt, vinegar or a milky cheese; here Prellwitz deftly adds similar components with the briny shrimp and tangy, spicy remoulade. The yellow squash soup (\$8.50) had hints of cumin and coriander and was garnished with violet-hued, crispy chive flowers and a gruyere-stuffed squash blossom. The squash blossom was a delightful, vegetal ravioli, and the nutty cheese played off of the earthy, velvety soup wonderfully.

In keeping with Firefly's unique range of vegan and meat dishes, we chose stuffed mush-





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rooms and a pork chop as our entrees. For the roasted and stuffed portabellini mushrooms with heirloom squash, quinoa and avocado (\$18), Prellwitz makes a playful — and substantial — sandwich of the mushroom caps, spreading a sweet, juicy layer of leek and white corn puree in between. The bed of nutty quinoa was surrounded by chunks of squash sautéed in a lime-chili sauce, and stunning green-yellow ribbons of avocado nestled on top. The sustainably raised grilled pork chop with butter beans, arugula and bourbon-ginger sauce (\$23) was tender and moist, with cross-hatches from the grill. On top rested a haystack of fried leek strips, and after a couple bites, they had tumbled from their perch to be enrobed in the sauce. The beans lived up to their name, forming a creamy, buttery base and were nicely accented with bitter, peppery notes from the arugula.

Firefly's beverage menu is artfully curated, with a focused selection of quality beer, several wines by the glass or bottle and some craft soft drinks and juices. My guest and I enjoyed a glass of white meritage wine (\$7.50) and a dry fino sherry (\$5) to start. Later, a malty red ale (\$5) paired perfectly with the squash soup's curry and the grilled pork chop's bourbon sweet and subtly smoky notes.

Pastry chef Debbie Hughes' desserts are as tempting as the dinner items. We tried the lemon-meringue mousse with graham shortbread, strawberries and thyme (\$8.50). The mousse was underlain by a buttery, crispy graham cookie topped with a layer of toasted meringue, and sprinkled with the thyme and scarlet strawberries. It was a concert of textures and bright, sweet flavors to finish a perfect meal. The service was professional, friendly and educated all evening, and Firefly's ethos of comfort allowed for a leisurely, enjoyable visit.

Firefly is not snobby or dogmatic, and the only self-indulgence coming from the kitchen is that Prellwitz won't cook what he won't eat. Fortunately for the rest of us, his tastes are playful, inquisitive and comforting. At Firefly, we get to eat very well indeed. 🍴

*Rich Higgins is a foodie, brewer and cicerone, and he pairs great beer and great food wherever he goes. Contact him at [richhiggins.com](http://richhiggins.com).*